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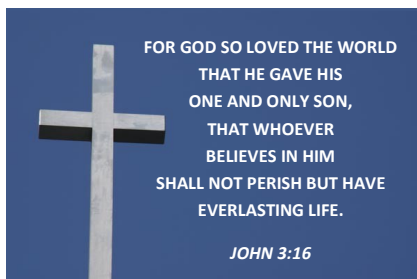
The Greatest Story

"I am not a stranger to the dark
Hide away, they say
'Cause we don't want your broken parts
I've learned to be ashamed of all my
scars
Run away, they say
No one 'll love you as you are"



These words from the Greatest Showman ring true for many of us-we might not have noticeable scars, but we all have hurts, and 'broken parts' that we don't let others see-even those nearest to us.

The **GOOD NEWS** is that the last line **IS NOT TRUE**. Although many of us have loved ones, and have been shown love and affection, some of us are never told we are loved, or are of any worth, or we just don't feel 'lovely' in ourselves. In the Bible, which is the book of God's words, it says in John 3: 16,



God loves us so deeply because He made us, He knows us inside out, and He wants us to know Him. The only problem is that because we sin, we cannot be with Him, or have a relationship with Him as we are. So God made a plan... God is holy - He cannot have sin in heaven, so what could He do to make sure that we could be with Him? He needed someone who would take our sin, pay for it, and be punished in our place. The only person who could do that was Jesus, God's Son. He is also holy and without sin, and so He obeyed His Father - He came to earth and died on the cross, allowing the punishment we deserved to fall on Him. This is **AMAZING LOVE**. That we would be considered so precious to God, that He would give His only Son to die instead of us.

We have got to believe it though. The verse says ... "whoever believes in Him" - what does this mean? It means that we realise that there is a God who has created us, and that we have a problem in that we sin, are lost, and can't 'solve' life by ourselves. If we believe this, we need to talk to God and ask Him to forgive our sin, trusting that Jesus has taken the punishment we deserve.

In another song by a Christian group called Casting Crowns, they ask the question, **Who Am I?**

"Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt?
Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin
Would look on me with love

The Greatest Story continued...

And watch me rise again?
Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea
Would call out through the rain
And calm the storm in me?"

And then they answer-

"Not because of who I am
But because of what you've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who you are."

God has done it all - He has made a way because He loves us deeply. He showed His true love at the cross. Selwyn Hughes, a Christian writer says this - that at the cross, ***"Jesus drew back the curtains and revealed what is in the heart of God the Father. His unconditional, unquenchable, unsearchable, undying, unutterable love."***

Then he says, "God is crazy about us. Whoever else might not be crazy about you, keep this thought always in your mind - God is."

God! Who Needs Him? What People Say!

1) I don't need God!

God is for wimps. I am in control. I am master of my own life. I am strong, independent, successful and happy. I don't need a crutch.

2) I might need something or someone.

I am worried about the future. My hopes and dreams have not materialised. My health is failing. My loved one is ill.

I never gave much thought to God, but now I am praying to Him. I feel vulnerable and helpless. I am not young anymore. I am giving God a try.

3) God has failed me!

I tried to keep the commandments. I was a good son and parent. I helped my neighbours. I went to church. I prayed. I set an example. But God has failed me. My loved one suffered and died. My children have gone astray. I am finished with God. He doesn't care.

4) There is no God!

We are on our own. Just look at the world. The innocent suffer. The wicked prosper. Look at the disasters like earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, wars etc... If there is a God He is either powerless or cruel. He doesn't care. He is not worth my attention. We must help ourselves.

5) I believe in God!

I have faith. I follow my religion. I obey my

church. I Pray. I am generous with my time and money. I am a good neighbour. I have to admit that in fact, I am a good person. What more can I do? What more does God expect? I have a good chance of heaven.

Who is right??

Surely God should make Himself known!

He has! In creation. (see Romans Chapter 1 verse 20) What He has made.

"for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities (His eternal power and divine nature) have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

In His Son. (see Galatians Chapter 4 verse 4)

What He has done.

"...when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law..."

In His Word (see John Chapter 14)

Jesus says, ***"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."*** ***"I am the Way the Truth and the Life"***

God! Who needs Him?

You do.

Who wants Him?

Do you?

Hidden Treasure.

Have you seen any of the Peter Rabbit coins? Shoppers everywhere are keeping an eagle eye out for them in their change, as some of them have been sold for up to £1000



Commemorative coins are nothing new. At the minute, there are 35 different 50p designs in circulation. The three rarest are the Kew Gardens 50p, the Sir Issac Newton 50p and the Jemima Puddle-Duck 50p; with the Kew Gardens ones going for at least £400.

So now, thanks to the distinctive animals on them, more people are sifting through their loose change like someone panning for gold, rather than just throwing it in the 'poor box'. The thought that they could come across something in their handful of loose change that could be worth exponentially more than its face value has captured the attention of shoppers everywhere.

There are a lot of times we think we know what something is, but don't see the true value to it. It's a foregone conclusion. Just like you could disregard the loose change in your pocket as being worth next to nothing while missing out on something far more valuable, you could also be doing the same in other areas of your life.

It's easy to drive past a Church, or walk past the Bible that you know is on your bookshelf and not give either one a second thought. You don't think there is anything there that will surprise you; you don't notice anything of value.

Matthew 13:44 says ***"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."***

In this parable, the man is so convinced of the value of the treasure he has found that he "sells all that he has" to obtain it. The value of what he found in the field is so great that no sacrifice is too much. Just like the normal-looking field in the parable, and the normal-looking handful of change in your pocket, there is a lot about Christ that seems so familiar that we can easily miss the true value of His sacrifice.

In the same way that the man in the parable gave up everything for the treasure in the field, God gave up everything for us by sending His Son Jesus. But, when we think about this in terms of the story, it doesn't seem to make much sense. In the parable, the man's sacrifice is wise: he was spending money to make money, it was an investment. However when we look at Christ's sacrifice for us, it doesn't seem to make sense that He should die for us despite all our sins against Him.

That's because Christ's sacrifice for us wasn't about God getting something out of it. God doesn't need anything from us; there is nothing about us that God needs. The reason Christ died for us was a selfless love that we could never earn. John 3:16 says ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."***

The reason God sent His Son to die for us was love. There is nothing in us that makes us more valuable to Him, but there is something about Him that is worth any sacrifice we can make, and that is the way to salvation.

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
John 14:6

Are You Sure?

Years ago when you booked a flight the airline provided a printed ticket. This you showed to get through security and onto the plane. As long as you had the ticket you could be sure that, weather permitting, you would be flying. Today many people book 'online' and keep the record of the booking on their phone. It's so much more convenient to use an 'app.'

But for some folk, especially of my generation, this brings a level of uncertainty. I'm not comfortable in my own mind when I approach the security machines complete with phone in hand. I wonder will the bar code reader work properly. Or, will the phone battery go dead at the most inconvenient moment, and leave me with no proof of my ticket. Somehow having that piece of paper gave me much more 'peace of mind.' Not as much could go wrong with the paper ticket.



This is true of so many things in life. We like to be sure. We allow extra time to get to the airport just in case we have a flat tyre on the road or the queue for security is very long. We take out insurance on our house and its contents to give us peace of mind for fear there is a big storm or we get burgled! People like assurance so they get insurance. It keeps the stress levels down!

Long ago a very religious man came to Jesus one night and asked how he could be sure not of a place on a plane but of a place in heaven. His name was Nicodemus. You can read about him in John's gospel chapter 3. Nicodemus understood that human life does not go on forever so it was important for him to know how to be certain his soul was safe. He also understood that being religious and doing good deeds was no guarantee of heaven otherwise he would have had peace of mind. Hebrews 9:27 tells us, ***"...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement."***

Judgement is as a result of sin and we all know in our hearts that we have sinned. Romans 3:23 makes this clear but so does our consciences. ***"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** The Bible goes on to explain the consequences of our sin, ***"The soul who sins shall die..."*** Ezekiel 18:20. Death occurs on two levels. There is physical death and spiritual death. When we attend a funeral we come face to face with physical death but spiritual death is what we currently suffer as a consequence of our sin and this ultimately leads to hell. This was the problem Nicodemus faced. Because of his sin he feared the judgement of God. We are all in exactly the same position as he was.

Thankfully God has provided the solution. Romans 6:23 declares, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loved us so much that He left the riches of heaven to become a man and deliver us from our sin. This is what Nicodemus learned. John 3:16 states, ***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."***

Jesus came to identify with us in our humanity and our weakness but He did so without being tainted by human sin. Once again the Bible makes this truth clear, ***"For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*** Hebrews 4:15

Are You Sure?

Anyone who has an interest in sport understands the idea of a substitute. If a player gets injured or is not performing in a way that gives maximum benefit to the team the manager takes them off and puts another player or substitute on to play in their place. Jesus came to be our substitute. He died on the cross as the only one worthy to pay the penalty for our sins. Cecil Francis Alexander wrote in her famous hymn, "There is a Green Hill Far Away,"

"There was no other good enough, To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate, Of heaven and let us in."

When Nicodemus stood before Jesus seeking assurance of a place in heaven he was looking at the only man on all the earth who could help him. The apostle Paul explained how this worked when he wrote to the Christians at Corinth in 2 Corinthians. 5:21, ***"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*** When Jesus, a perfect, sinless and totally innocent man, died on the cross He did not die for anything wrong that He had done. Instead He died as our substitute for all the sins we had committed. The death sentence we deserve because of our sin was carried out on Him so that we could go to heaven.

To be forgiven we must recognise and repent of our sins. Forgiveness is not automatic. It is conditional on repentance. 1 John 1:9 makes this clear, ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** We must also be clear that Jesus is the only way into heaven. He said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."*** Peter proclaimed this same truth in Acts 4:12 when he stated, ***"And there is salvation in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."***

When Christ died on the cross for us He said, ***"It is finished"*** John 19:30. In those times these words were commonly written across certificates of debt when they were cancelled. It meant, "Paid in full." When Jesus deals with our sins we can enter heaven. Christ offers to everyone the gifts of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. In Revelation 22:17 the Holy Spirit says, ***"And let the one who hears say, Come And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."*** We must come to Christ empty handed taking no credit for salvation. It is a gift. Paul taught the Ephesian Christians, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no-one may boast."*** Ephesians 2:8-9.

This is the lesson Nicodemus had to learn if he was to be sure of a place in heaven. To all my readers I say, now is the time to make things right with God. Confess your sinfulness and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on your behalf. Isaiah said, ***"Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near;"*** Isaiah 55:6. Another hymn writer, Ludwig von Zinzendorf, contemplating facing God on Judgement Day recorded with confidence,

"Bold shall I stand in that great Day, For who aught to my charge shall lay?
While through Thy blood, Absolved I am, From sin and fear, from guilt and shame."

It is said that, on one occasion, when Queen Victoria was staying at Balmoral an old highland woman asked her, "Will your majesty meet me in heaven?" The instant reply was, "I will, through the all-availing blood of Jesus." Even an Empress needed Christ's salvation. I hope that you too can be sure of heaven. Only the Lord Jesus can save. Trust Him.

Something Precious

What is precious to you? One man's rubbish is another man's treasure they say. I am a hoarder so I find it very difficult to throw anything away. This can be very annoying for those who have to live with me.

Recently we had some large built-in cupboards made, with good deep shelves for more storage. I can't wait to fill them. As a relative of ours once said when his sister was

proudly showing us around her brand new kitchen,

"Mair room for mair lummer!"



When I put photos of the new units up on Whats App, I was bombarded with messages from various family members warning me not to fill them with more rubbish. Even the joiner who made them informed me that there is a black thing outside the window for putting stuff in!

I tend to keep everything from my children's first shoes to orders of service (weddings and funerals). I am making a start on clearing out old newspapers and magazines at the minute but it is a slow process as I like to look through them first and cut out anything I want to keep!

I am glad I do as I have just found an article in our Easter magazine from 2009 written by my daughter. I had forgotten she had written it but I will definitely want to keep it. It is precious because it's the story of how she came to realize that she needed God in her life.

She had been attending children's meetings where she was taught from the bible. She learned that God loves her, but He hates

sin and even at that young age she knew she was a sinner and that sin was keeping her away from Him.

She was taught that sin had to be punished and Jesus had taken the punishment when He died on the cross. How lovely to read that she prayed for forgiveness and trusted in Jesus as Saviour and Lord one night at the meeting. Nothing else mattered to her at that moment but that she should get right with God.

In Ephesians 2 v 8 we read '**For by grace are you saved through faith and this is not your doing it is the gift of God.**'

It's amazing how much a child can understand and how God can speak to one so young. I know this personally because I was just eleven when I could no longer ignore the guilt that I was feeling before the holy God. I knew that no matter how hard I tried to be good, I couldn't. Only God could change me and I too asked Him to forgive me, take my sin away and make me His child. In my daughter's words there were no lightning bolts or thunder claps, but our lives were changed for ever. The past sins were dealt with and forgotten. The present is filled with a peace and inner joy that can only come from God. We are able to look forward to the future with confidence knowing He will always be with us working out His perfect plan for our lives and that we will go to be with Him in heaven when we die.

As I get older and accumulate more 'stuff' I realize that one day it will all be left behind. There is only one thing that is permanent and precious and that is the love of our Heavenly Father. In the end the only thing that matters is where we stand with Him.

'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.' Matthew 6: 20-21.

So Faith, Hope and Love Abide. 1Cor 13:3

Over the last few months we have heard many discussions about Brexit on the airwaves and at various venues. What has emerged over the last two years is that it has become a very complex and difficult process to get a consensus even within the various political parties. Each party delivering their spin, offering a different hope for future generations. Time will tell if Britain's exit from the European Union will be of a benefit to us.

The Oxford dictionary definition of hope states, **It as an optimistic attitude of mind on an expectation/desire.**

The hope our political leaders have is therefore blighted with fear and doubt as there are many reasons that will affect our future situation which is impossible to predict. Any sensible politician could not give any guarantees for the outcome.

Since God knows all future events because he has planned and purposed everything, how different then was his plan for our salvation. There was only one plan established and he knew that Jesus Christ would willingly carry the plan through to its completion. While on the cross the bible records the following, ***After this, Jesus 'knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.*** John 19:28-30

While he lived on this earth Jesus Christ said, ***I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me.*** John 14:6

I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly. John 10:10

The Apostle Paul said,

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

All three virtues are interwoven in the Christian faith. The strength of my hope is based on the confident expectation of the faithfulness of God's promises outlined in the bible.

The hymn writer Edward Mote wrote,
***"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand."***

The Apostle Paul said,

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

On what are you putting your hope?

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God's Love

God's love is the core theme of the Bible, and is at the heart of His redemption plan for humanity. It was the underlying tone for much of Jesus' ministry while on earth, as He taught us to love God and love your neighbour.

In the original Greek, there were 4 words that described different types of love, not all are in the Bible.

These are:

- Eros- this referred to romantic love
- Storge- this is brotherly love
- Philia- which describes a loving and caring friendship
- Agape- this word describes God's love towards humanity. We can't compare this love to our own emotions as it is perfect, unconditional love.

John 3:16 is a well known verse which uses the word 'agape' to describe how great God's love for humanity is. It is only due to this love of God that we can come to forgiveness. We cannot earn forgiveness through good deeds and we aren't owed anything by God. It is because God loves us unconditionally that He will accept us. We are told this in Ephesians 2:8 *'For it is*

by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Many people will say, "How can a loving God send people to Hell?" The people who ask this make a mistake of focussing on one attribute of God. But God is also just, and is opposed to sin, and therefore must punish those guilty of sin. We must remember that everyone deserves Hell, because we are all sinful by nature. But Christians can find reassurance in God's grace as I mentioned before. People who live their lives sinfully desire separation from God and want no relationship with Him. When such people die, God hands them over to their desires for separation from Him in Hell. C.S. Lewis said that hell is **"the greatest monument to human freedom."**

In light of this Christians must evangelise the unsaved and make them aware of the doomed eternity they face, and tell them of God's love for them. Those of us who are Christians are only so because of God's mercy and we should want to deliver this message to our friends, family and others around us out of love for them.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Sunday

Sunday

Tuesday

Saturday

3rd Thursday of the month,

Morning Worship.

(Lord's Supper)

Evening Service.

Bible Study & Prayer Meeting.

Youth Fellowship. (see website)

Ladies' Bible study.

11:00 a.m.-12:00.

12:00-12:30 p.m.

6:30-7:30 p.m.

8:00-9:30 p.m.

7:30-9:00 p.m.

8:00-9:30 p.m.

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